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ABSTRACT

This guide presents basic information on searching the World Wide Web and lists selected Web sites and links to resources that contain information on rural development. The guide describes and differentiates among search engines, Web directories, metacrawlers, and mutations. Searching tips include: using quotation marks around phrases; using plus and minus signs or Boolean expressions; truncating when appropriate; being as specific as possible; adding more words to narrow the search; searching in specific fields; thinking of synonyms; paying attention to dates; handling broken links; taking advantage of search engine help; and setting the browser to highlight visited links. Features and capabilities are listed for 12 search engines, directories, and metacrawlers, and addresses are provided for 19 such sites, as well as 5 additional sites that offer search engine help and analysis. A directory presents Web addresses and brief descriptions for 90 rural development Web sites in the categories of community development, economic development, education, finance and government, health, libraries, and transportation. (SV)

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Finding Rural Development Resources on the World Wide Web: *Tips and Techniques for Efficient Searches*

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Finding Rural Development Resources on the World Wide Web: *Tips and Techniques for Efficient Searches*

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Introduction

Current fascination with the World Wide Web (WWW) should come as no surprise. Suddenly the vast universe of information seems readily available to anyone with a computer. It is no longer necessary to play telephone tag or menu roulette or be transferred endless times to get information. Instead, whether you want community development organizations, reports on successful downtown revitalization projects, or ideas for hospital financing, you can find it yourself!

Or can you? Probably, but the process is not always as straightforward as it sounds. A recent article compared doing research on the Internet to taking a two-year-old for a walk: "Pretty pebbles and deeply meaningful small sticks present themselves, but enlightenment seldom proceeds in a straight line" (Skow 1999, 61). Unless you are searching for something unusual and specific, the Internet will rarely yield the exact answer in the first hit, and often the most useful bit of information will be several links away from where you began. Inexperienced users often feel totally frustrated and trapped in an endless loop of lists and links, unable to land on anything that gives the kind of information wanted.

Although search engines and directories are both proliferating and expanding, there is no master catalog to the WWW. No single tool is comprehensive enough to search the entire Web. In fact, a recent study determined that even the combined use of eleven search engines provided access to only 42 percent of the Web's pages. The same study also found that even the most comprehensive search engine indexes approximately only one-sixth of the Web's estimated 800 million pages, which is down from one-third a year earlier (Lawrence and Giles 1999). Despite these discouraging figures, there are ways to search the Web efficiently. The nature of the information sought will dictate the best type of search. Sometimes just browsing through Yahoo! may be the best tactic, while other searches will demand more focus or finesse.

This guide presents basic information on effective use of the World Wide Web, including descriptions of search engines and how to get the most from search tools, along with selected web sites and links to resources which contain information on rural development.

What Are Search Engines, Directories, and Metacrawlers?

Or, what is the difference between Infoseek, Yahoo!, and Dogpile?[1] These names and many others are referred to frequently and are often used interchangeably without any indication that there are differences among them. The differences are considerable, however, and the first step to effective web searching is understanding these differences and their implications.

Search Engines

Search engines work automatically by using "spiders" or "crawlers" to constantly visit web pages and follow each link, recording as they go. Everything they encounter is woven into a giant index which can then be searched by the engine's software. The software explores the index to find the most relevant matches for a search. Because both spiders and software vary, the same search will yield different results from one engine to another. AltaVista, Infoseek, HotBot, Northern Light, Google!, and Excite are some popular search engines.

Search engines are extremely powerful, which make them the best place to go when specific information is needed. For example, a HotBot search for *Illinois community profiles* will bring more sites than needed, but within the first five hits, three excellent sources of community information emerge: The Community Profile Network, Community Profiles from CIPS, and AMS HomeFinder Community Profiles. Results from a more general search will be overwhelming; a HotBot search for *community profiles*, for example, yielded more than 16,000 hits.

Directories

Directories, on the other hand, use human intervention. People, rather than spiders, find and submit sites to the directory. Each site is given a description and assigned to one or more categories. The searcher can find information by looking within a category or searching for a match within the words of the site's description. Yahoo! is the largest, oldest, and most popular directory, but there are others such as LookSmart and Snap.

Directories often prove to be good starting places for broad searches such as *community development* or *public libraries*. They also are excellent for finding home pages of organizations. A search for *Heartland Center* quickly brought up the link for the Heartland Center for Leadership Development. A word of caution here. Yahoo!'s categories do not include "rural" in the hierarchy, so while searches may turn up results, they will probably come from many categories and vary widely in relevance.

[1]Addresses for each site are listed on pages 11 through 34.

Metacrawlers

Metacrawlers, also called metasearch engines, do not send out their own crawlers to build an index. Instead, a metacrawler enables the search to be run in several search engines at the same time. Results are gathered and grouped on the metacrawler page. Well-known metasearch engines include Dogpile, SavvySearch, InferenceFind, MetaFind, and Go2Net (formerly MetaCrawler). Each of these metacrawlers features a unique combination of search engines and its own method of reporting results, so similar searches will produce different outcomes across metacrawlers.

Metacrawlers work especially well when no searching has been done in a subject area and the goal is to get an overview of what is available where. A metasearch can help determine the best direction for further research. A search on *rural libraries* in Dogpile, for example, shows many databases with fewer than five hits but also three with more than 250 each. The best approach would probably be to ignore all except those three, exploring further within these by using their individual features to make the search more specific. No specialized functions unique to individual search engines work within metasearchers—a major disadvantage.

Mutations

For a variation of the metasearch, visit a site such as The BigHub.com. Like other metacrawlers, it can search multiple search engines and directories. What sets it apart is that it also provides access to "classified specialty search engines" which would be cumbersome to seek out separately. Selecting the "Health" category, for example, yields 10 subcategories from which to choose, as well as 15 general health-related indexes which can be searched right from the BigHub screen with your own words or phrases.

Similarly, Beaucoup! and All-in-One have collected many specialized search engines, indexes, and directories at one convenient location. Somewhat smaller, they divide their lists into different, and possibly more useful, categories. While less flexible and powerful than the standard search engines, these resources are worth checking occasionally to see if a database devoted to a specific area of interest can be found. Such a database could then become the first choice for many searches.

Additional hybrids further tangle the Web. Many search engines also maintain directory listings of highly reviewed or rated sites, while others include directory-type subject groupings. Lycos, for example, offers a search engine as well as a subject directory and features guides to what it considers top sites. Excite provides "Channels," a subject directory with reviews. Remember that "top" or popular or highly reviewed sites are not necessarily the most useful for all needs, so these may not be the best places to start searching.

Getting the Most from a Search Tool

Although each search tool has its unique features and capabilities, certain basic techniques are nearly universal. The following are some strategies to keep in mind:

- **Use quotation marks around phrases.** If the words *rural*, *community*, and *development* should not just be present anywhere in any order but need to show up together and in order as "*rural community development*," then the quotation marks are necessary.
- **Use the plus sign (+) and the minus sign (-).** Putting a plus in front of every word or phrase means that every result is supposed to have each of those words or phrases. This will be irrelevant in some databases because the software assumes every word put in is wanted. But in others, the default is to assume the first words are most important. Thus, a search for *rural education finance* could yield different, and probably less relevant, results than *+rural +education +finance*. The minus sign tells the software to eliminate any results which include the word or phrase. So *+rural +education -"home schooling"* would pull up hits with both rural and education, but eliminate any that also mention the phrase "*home schooling*." In a few databases, such as Infoseek, the minus sign only means that the word is less desirable than the others, so some references might sneak in but be less prominent. Other databases will tell searchers to "use Boolean expressions" instead of (+) and (-). If this happens, the words "*AND*" or "*NOT*" should be used between words. Therefore, *rural AND education AND finance* would produce hits in which all three words are present, while *rural AND education NOT "home schooling"* would again remove the last phrase from the search.
- **Truncate when appropriate.** A word such as *finance*, for example, has many forms. Truncation allows a single search to replace multiple searches for various forms of the same word. In most databases that allow truncation, the symbol is an asterisk. So "*rural financ**" would produce a search for the word *rural* in combination with *finance* or *financial* or *financing* or *finances* or any other word beginning with that six-letter root.
- **Be as specific as possible.** No matter which search engine is selected, thousands of results can be retrieved for any one attempt. The more direct the search, the better. For information on rural doctors, do not start with *rural health*. They are related, of course, but since rural health encompasses far more than just physicians, the first phrase would produce many irrelevant hits. Try to begin with the narrowest idea or the rarest word.

- **Add more words to narrow the search.** A search in Google! on *"rural public libraries"* yields 244 hits. This can be cut considerably, however, by adding another phrase. A second search *+"rural public libraries" +"community development"* produces only 16 hits. Assuming material discussing both of these ideas is the goal, then going right to these 16 is much more useful than wading through all 244. Narrowing always means running the risk of eliminating potentially useful sites, so balance that against the number of useless sites being avoided.
- **Search in specific fields.** Most of the major databases will allow limiting a search to titles of web pages, for example, rather than the entire contents of the site. This can drastically reduce the number of hits. For example, a HotBot search for *"rural development"* generated more than 200,000 sites. This can be narrowed by adding another word to the phrase. *"Rural community development"* cut the results almost in half, still producing over 100,000. But *title: "rural community development"* yielded a far more manageable and appropriate group of 51 sites, all of which have the search phrase within their title.
- **Think synonyms.** A few of the engines will do this automatically, but most search by exactly the words typed in rather than the concepts. If using *"rural doctors"* does not get desired results, try *"rural physicians"* instead. Most of the larger databases will also accommodate this with a single command, which is more efficient than repeated searches. For example, *+(rural OR nonmetropolitan) +(doctors OR physicians)* would produce sites that must have either of the words *rural* or *nonmetropolitan* and also must use either *doctors* or *physicians*. ("*OR*" is another Boolean expression.) Remember that putting more words in with an "*OR*" means expanding rather than narrowing a search. Once a search is widened to include possible synonyms, it can be narrowed by adding a third concept such as *retention*.
- **Pay attention to dates.** This is not so much a search technique as an evaluative one, but important given the nature of web searching. While some of the material might still be interesting, a four- or five-year-old web site that has not been maintained will probably be of limited value. Many of the links it provides to other resources will be long dead. A couple of search engines will provide results in order by date so that newer pages appear first, but the majority will report results by relevancy, regardless of date.

- **Expect broken links.** Inevitably searchers will find what looks like a great hit, only to discover that the link is gone. Usually, it is best to forget it and continue; however, if the site seems worth additional effort, a couple of options remain. The first is to shorten the address, since perhaps only the last part has changed. For example, a (fictitious) report on rural education from the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs is supposed to have an address of <www.wiu.edu/iira/rrr/educate>, but typing that address results only in a message saying this address does not exist. Erase the "educate" part of the address and try again. If it does not work, erase the "rrr" as well. This should eventually link back to the organization which originally loaded the document, in this case the Institute. Ideally, the current Institute pages would provide a link to the new address of the desired report. The second option is related. If the address proves irretrievable in any form, do a new search specifically for the provider organization or even for words in the title of the report. Sometimes the results offer the same dead link, but occasionally a more current reference will exist and the link will be live.
- **Take advantage of search engine help.** A few databases offer the ability to find similar sites. In Excite, for example, after finding a really good hit, selecting the "More Like This" button will generate a new search for sites like the useful one in hand. Infoseek offers the option to "find similar pages."
- **Highlight visited links in an obvious color.** The beauty of hypertext is the ability to move from link to link in all directions without following any particular order. The related curse is sometimes moving in circles and wasting time. Although it does not work in every case, the browser (Netscape, Explorer) can be set to change the color of the links already used. Browsers also allow the searcher to determine how long these highlights will last. If using Netscape, edit "Preferences" to set the color and history options. With Explorer, the Internet options under "Tools" will permit changes to colors and history.

Search Engine Highlights

This section includes information on all three types of engine. The descriptions are not intended to be complete; instead, they emphasize features that could be reasons to search or not to search a particular database. Features change frequently, however, as search engines constantly work to improve their capabilities and market share. For up-to-date reviews, full descriptions, and easy comparison charts, two web sites are recommended: (1) Search Engine Showdown and (2) Search Engine Watch. Both of these also report on a more complete list of databases. For further guidance on choosing search engines, there are three excellent web tutorials: "Choose the Best Search for Your Purpose," "Search the Web To Find My Topic," and "Recommended Search Strategy."

AltaVista

- is one of the three largest search engines, offering comprehensive coverage
- is powerful, with intricate searching capabilities
- is great for intermediate to experienced users, although it is less user-friendly than some others
- allows saving search preferences as a bookmark so they can be reused for every search

AskJeeves

- accepts queries in full sentences or natural language
- tries to return only the best answer, not a list
- is extremely useful for fact finding and answering who/what/when/where questions
- has a smaller base of carefully selected sources with high-quality information

Dogpile

- brings results from many web databases, news databases, and FTP lists
- offers customization, the ability to choose which databases it searches
- submits the original query to individual search engines using the commands required by each and displays the new statement; useful for follow-up searching within a database
  Example: a Dogpile search input as *rural libraries and "community development"* brought results from many search engines, along with the "query string sent" for each one; these query strings ranged from *rural AND libraries AND "community development"* to *rural libraries "community development"* to *+rural +libraries +"community development"*
- groups results by database, telling how many from each
- retrieves ten maximum from each database but provides links to the rest
- is good starting point for a general search

Excite

- provides excellent summaries of the sites it finds
- searches by concept, not just exact words
- has easy searching features that are appropriate for beginning to intermediate users
- offers notable anticipatory options (e.g., "suggested terms," "try these first," "more like this")
- integrates non-web material into the results when appropriate

Google!

- provides consistently relevant results
- has a unique PageRank function which indicates how many web pages point to a particular document; uses this link popularity as a primary way to rank results
- keeps a large collection of cached pages, which can be reviewed to assess relevance before linking to live (and usually slower to load) pages
- describes sites and shows search words in context
- provides an option at each hit to visit all pages linked to the hit
- uncovers many individual papers and articles within web sites
  Example: a search on *"rural economic development"* uncovered an economic development plan for a county in Florida; a paper on the adequacy of rural financial markets; and a report on economic issues and rural economic development by a task force in Alaska, which was really a 30-page section within a larger document that was also available

HotBot

- is one of the three largest search engines
- provides easy search features for novices but also has many advanced search capabilities available
- has unparalleled graphical aids for creating a well-defined search, including lots of pull-down menus and options
- has many filters such as media type, pages with or without particular words, date, and page depth (determines how far down a hierarchy HotBot will go)
- offers a powerful option to search for people's names
- bookmarks preferences
- is a favorite for many librarians because it allows very precise queries

Inference Find

- searches six databases
- merges results and removes duplicates
- is effective and quick for searches expected to retrieve less than 100 hits
- has good integration of search results
- clusters results into neat understandable groupings instead of one giant list
  Example: a search for *"rural economic development"* brought hits grouped into categories such as rural development, rural economic development, nonprofit sites, commercial sites, educational institution sites, U.S. government sites, and others

Infoseek

- provides easy search features even for beginners
- groups results by site so there is less duplication
  Example: if a hit comes from USDA's Rural Development Agency, all other hits from pages within <www.rurdev.usda.gov> could be reached from one link
- accepts questions in full sentences as well as words or phrases
- is popular because it consistently provides high-quality results
- offers case-sensitive searching, good for finding proper names and phrases that include common words
  Example: *"Vitamin A"* only works in an engine that recognizes uppercase letters
- includes impressive human-compiled directory of sites
- allows further searching within the results of what is already retrieved

Lycos

- is a search engine plus subject directory, with reviewed sites
- is a good resource for finding pictures

Northern Light

- is one of the three largest search engines
- searches a massive publication collection in addition to the web, offering greater depth and more power than the others (documents can be purchased for $1-4)
- provides user-friendly uncluttered interface
- is excellent for very specific and detailed queries, particularly when the "power" option is used
- organizes results into folders which provide a valuable visual overview and help narrow a search
  Example: in a search of *"rural cooperatives,"* NL retrieved 646 items; these were offered both as one list and also organized into Custom Search Folders labeled "loans," "electric utilities," "government sites," "economics," "nonprofit sites," "condominiums and cooperatives," and "others"
- was *PC Magazine*'s "Editors' Choice" for best search engine last year

SavvySearch

- searches the major engines and guides or permits the selection and search of a specialized category such as e-mail addresses, encyclopedias, or magazine articles
- produces high-quality returns
- gives results in one list but for each hit tells which engines found them

Yahoo!

- is the largest human-compiled guide to the web—an unmatched directory
- provides easy access for novices and the experienced
- provides great cross-references
- is an excellent starting point for browsing and searching
- is useful when just one site on a general topic is needed
- was *PC Magazine*'s Editors' Choice for directory last year
- has earned a well-deserved reputation for helping people find information easily

Conclusion

By now it should be obvious that there is no one best database for searching the World Wide Web. For differing kinds of information needs, certain search engines will be better than others. Experiment with several, trying the same search and comparing results. After selecting a couple that seem to give the most relevant information, practice using their features. As with anything, repeated use will produce a more effective and efficient user. More success will come from searching a couple of engines competently than a dozen on a random basis. There are at least five different search engines which the ten people who work at the Western Illinois University Library reference desk try first. The librarians who use HotBot do not necessarily get better results than those who use AltaVista because each has become proficient at using his/her favorite. So experiment widely, select a few carefully, and use them repeatedly.

Addresses for Sites Mentioned

Search Engines

All-In-One	www.allonesearch.com
AltaVista	www.altavista.com
AskJeeves	www.askjeeves.com
Beaucoup!	www.beaucoup.com
The BigHub.com (formerly iSleuth)	www.thebighub.com
Dogpile	www.dogpile.com
Excite	www.excite.com
Google!	www.google.com
Go2Net (formerly MetaCrawler)	www.go2net.com
HotBot	www.hotbot.com
InferenceFind	www.infind.com
Infoseek	infoseek.go.com
LookSmart	www.looksmart.com
Lycos	www.lycos.com
MetaFind	www.metafind.com
Northern Light	www.northernlight.com
SavvySearch	www.savvysearch.com
Snap	www.snap.com
Yahoo!	www.yahoo.com

Search Engine Help and Analysis

Choose the Best Search for Your Purpose
(from Nueva School Library)
<www.nueva.pvt.k12.ca.us/~debbie/library/research/adviceengine.html>

Search the Web To Find My Topic
(from O'Keefe Library, St. Ambrose University)
<www.sau.edu/bestinfo/Refdesk/Find/findex.htm>

Recommended Search Strategy: Search with Peripheral Vision
(from Univerzsity of California, Berkeley, Library)
<www.lib.berkeley.edu/TeachingLib/Guides/Internet/Strategies.html>

Search Engine Showdown
<www.notess.com>

Search Engine Watch
<www.searchenginewatch.com>

Selected Web Sites for Rural Development

The web sites below have been gathered using the recommended search techniques. This is not an exhaustive list by any means; these sites were chosen to demonstrate the variety of useful rural development resources available via the WWW. The list is organized into the following sections: Community Development, Economic Development, Education, Finance and Government, Health, Libraries, and Transportation. All addresses are current as of September 1999. This publication is also available on the IIRA web page (www.iira.org), under Publications, with links embedded.

Liszt: Intro to Mailing Lists

<www.liszt.com>

Liszt is a huge directory of thousands of discussion groups and newsletters. It offers help in finding useful electronic mailing lists and describes how to get more information and join.

Community Development

AMS HomeFinder Community Profiles

<www.amshomefinder.com/main_community.html>

This site offers a searchable database in which a state, county, and town can be specified. Since the main site is a relocation service, the community profiles differ in focus from other such databases. A profile includes information on schools, housing (e.g., costs, age, size), transportation, demographics, and the workforce.

Blue Ribbon Practices in Community Development

<www.hud.gov/ptw/menu.html>

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development uses the annual Blue Ribbon awards to identify and recognize hundreds of successful projects, management tools, techniques, and innovations in communities across the country. Descriptions of these model practices can be searched by topics, key words, years, and states or localities.

Center for Rural Community Revitalization and Development

<www.ianr.unl.edu/rural>

The University of Nebraska's Center for Rural Community Revitalization and Development educates and assists people in rural areas in strengthening their communities and improving their quality of life. The web site describes the Center's programs and services and provides an excellent "Rural Issues Information Center," which is divided into categories such as rural health care and medicine; sustainable development; community information and associations; economic and community development; entrepreneurial and small business development; distance education; and banking, loans, and financing.

CIPS Community Profiles

<www.cipsco.com/cips/community.html>

The Central Illinois Public Service Company has compiled profiles of 36 Illinois communities. Each includes population and economic statistics, medical facilities, taxation, municipal services, education, major employers, labor, business services, recreation, utilities, transportation resources, industrial sites, and community contacts.

Community Networking Movement

<www.scn.org/ip/commnet>

This site describes community networks, examines the issues they face, offers information from a variety of presentations, and provides resources for organizations trying to build a community network.

Community Profile Network

<www.villageprofile.com>

The Network provides access to community information via maps, tours, a marketplace, chats, and showcases. A community profile includes an overview, history, shopping information, a business directory, and transportation information. Community information is not limited to Illinois.

Community Profiles Search

<www.commerce.state.il.us/communityprofiles/cp.htm>

The Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs has created a database of community profiles. Each profile reports on economic development amenities, general information, health facilities, community facilities, transportation, education facilities, taxes, utilities, employment, and location services. The profiles database can be reached from the DCCA site, but not easily, so the direct approach is recommended.

Empowerment Zone and Enterprise Community Program

<www.ezec.gov>

The EZ/EC program is designed to afford communities real opportunities for growth and revitalization and is based on fostering economic opportunity, sustainable community development, community-based partnerships, and a strategic vision for change. This site includes a community toolbox, which provides access to resources that can help a community identify and solve problems. Links to sites with funding opportunities, community development resources, successful development practices, and software are also useful.

Heartland Center for Leadership Development

<www.4w.com/heartland>

The Heartland Center is an independent nonprofit organization whose programs and publications stress the critical role played by local leadership as communities and organizations face the challenges associated with changing times. It uses practical resources, hands-on programs in community leadership development, and public policies for rural community survival. The site describes programs and activities and offers a good set of links to related organizations.

Illinois Council on Food and Agricultural Research

<www.ag.uiuc.edu/~c-far>

While much of C-FAR's mission is focused on food and agricultural research, it is currently working on a proposal for a rural community development strategic research initiative. Details about the project are available on the site.

Illinois Department of Commerce and Community Affairs

<www.commerce.state.il.us/newhome.htm>

DCCA promotes business, community, and tourism development activities in Illinois. The site describes services and provides information on community development, economic facts and figures, energy and recycling, market development, small business, and more.

National Center for Small Communities/National Association of Towns and Townships
<www.natat.org>

NCSC is a non-profit organization devoted to serving the leaders of America's smaller communities. It provides small town decisionmakers with the tools to govern effectively and the skills to expand local economies, protect natural resources, and preserve community character. This site includes information on issues such as financing, education, regulatory compliance, and community capacity building. Member communities are linked from this site. The purpose of NATaT is to strengthen the effectiveness of town government by educating lawmakers and public policy officials about how small town governments operate. The two organizations operate a joint site.

Neighborhoods Online
<www.libertynet.org/nol/natl.html>

Neighborhoods Online is a resource center for people working to build strong communities. It provides fast access to information and ideas covering all aspects of neighborhood revitalization. The site includes data, issue papers, statistics, and resource links on topics such as cities, community development, education, crime, and welfare.

Regional Rural Development Centers

The United States has four regional rural development centers which coordinate rural development research, education, and extension efforts to improve the lives of people living in nonmetropolitan areas.

North Central Regional Center for Rural Development (Iowa State University)
<www.ag.iastate.edu/centers/rdev/RuralDev.html>

Northeast Regional Center for Rural Development (Pennsylvania State University)
<www.cas.psu.edu/docs/casconf/nercrd/nercrd.html>

Southern Rural Development Center (Mississippi State University)
<ext.msstate.edu/srdc>

Western Rural Development Center (Oregon State University)
<www.orst.edu/Dept/WRDC/>

Rural Local Initiatives Support Corporation

<www.ruralisc.org>

Rural LISC's purpose is to build the capacity of resident-led rural community development corporations, increase their production and impact, and make the resource and policy environment more supportive of rural CDCs and their work. The site details goals, commitments, and accomplishments; highlights programs; and describes the CDCs served.

University of Illinois Extension

<www.ag.uiuc.edu>

University of Illinois Extension provides practical, research-based information and programs to help individuals, families, farms, businesses, and communities in Illinois put knowledge to work. This site describes Extension's many programs and projects.

Economic Development

AeRie—Applied Rural Telecommunications: An Economic Development Resource Center
<bcn.boulder.co.us/aerie>

AeRie provides a toolkit of resources to help rural communities meet their economic and community development goals using telecommunications. This site offers guides to community investment and rural telecommunications, an overview of basic concepts, and background information on rural infrastructure.

Appalachian Regional Commission
<www.arc.gov>

ARC's mission is to be an advocate for and partner with its people to create opportunities for self-sustaining economic development and improved quality of life. The thirteen-state partnership funds a variety of projects to address goals such as developing a knowledgeable and skilled population, strengthening the region's physical infrastructure, and creating a dynamic economic base. This site describes programs and initiatives and provides regional statistics and reports.

Center for Rural Affairs
<www.cfra.org>

The Center engages in research, education, advocacy, and service work to build communities that stand for social justice, economic opportunity, and environmental stewardship. Projects include analyzing strategies to increase family farming opportunities and working with rural communities to support self-employment and small business opportunities. This site includes issues; program and project descriptions; articles from the newsletter; and links to resources on microenterprise, hog factories, school finance, rural development, and more.

Center for Rural Studies
<crs.uvm.edu>

The Center is a nonprofit, fee-for-service research organization which addresses social, economic, and resource-based problems of rural people and communities. This site includes economic development guides and training materials for citizens and community leaders, as well as information on community development projects.

Community and Economic Development—Joint Center for Sustainable Communities

<www.naco.org/programs/comm_dev/center/resource.cfm>

A project of the National Association of Counties, the Joint Center maintains a clearinghouse that provides city and county officials with material on sustainable community development activities, including information on creative city and county partnerships and decisionmaking tools to address economic, environmental, and quality of life challenges.

Community and Rural Development

<www.callsouthcarolina.com/Divisions.htm>

This division of the South Carolina Department of Commerce works with counties to develop strategic plans to help communities articulate a development focus, improve economic development budgets, purchase land for development, and develop programs for constructing and managing speculative buildings. This site includes detailed descriptions of various business incentives and provides access to interactive site evaluation and selection tools.

EconData.Net

<www.hevanet.com/lad/sources.htm>

This site collects links to sources of socioeconomic data for economic development analysis in local and regional economies. Grouped into categories such as Bureau of Economic Analysis, Public, Private, Bureau of Labor Statistics/State Labor Market Information, and others, the sources cover a broad range of data. Also available from this site is the full text of *Socioeconomic Data for Understanding Your Regional Economy: A User's Guide*, a 96-page handbook offering practical advice for analyzing local economies.

Economic Development Administration

<www.doc.gov/eda>

Part of the U.S. Department of Commerce, EDA was established to generate jobs, help retain existing jobs, and stimulate industrial and commercial growth in economically distressed areas of the United States. It works in partnership with local and state governments, regional economic development districts, public and private nonprofit organizations, and Indian tribes to empower distressed communities to develop and implement their own economic development and revitalization strategies. This site describes EDA programs, provides reports and publications, and offers links to sites of interest to economic development practitioners.

Economic Development Web Site

<www.hhh.umn.edu/centers/slp/edweb>

Provided by the State and Local Policy Program at the Hubert H. Humphrey Institute of Public Affairs, this site offers four types of assistance. These include links to sources of economic data at the state or national level; a framework for industry analysis, which describes the necessary data and what to do with it in order to understand the industry; tools for developing an economic development strategy; and links to economic development resources, grouped by topics and by states.

Huck Boyd National Institute for Rural Development

<www.ksu.edu/huckboyd>

The Institute is a public/private partnership with a mission to help people help themselves. It conducts rural policy studies, provides outreach to communities, and profiles successful entrepreneurs, communities, and projects.

Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs

<www.iira.org> **or** <cait.wiu.edu/iira/main.html>

The Institute serves policy makers, community leaders, regional planning officials, and residents interested in improving the quality of life in rural Illinois. It focuses on research and programs for education, health, economic development, financing services, transportation, and innovative management. This site provides full texts of the many Institute publications, links to a variety of rural resources, and Illinois maps illustrating levels of education, employment, housing, population, poverty, and income.

Laboratory of Community and Economic Development

<www.ag.uiuc.edu/~lced/main.html>

LCED supports community and economic development efforts of local people, their governments, and representatives. It provides information and educational programs and conducts research on economic and social issues relevant to communities and their leaders. This site describes programs, interactive tools, resources, and presentations and offers fact sheets, articles, and economic data for Illinois.

National Association of Development Organizations

<www.nado.org>

NADO provides training, information, and representation for regional development organizations in small metropolitan and rural America. The public interest group advocates a regional approach to community, economic, and rural development and offers a network for the sharing of ideas and innovations.

National Business Incubation Association

<www.nbia.org>

NBIA provides a clearinghouse of information on the business incubation industry, explaining the concept of incubation and offering industry facts. This site offers a resource center, links to incubator pages, and a guide to the best Internet sites for incubator managers and their clients.

Regional Economic Information System

<govinfo.kerr.orst.edu/reis-stateis.html>

The REIS database provides local area economic data for metropolitan areas, counties, and states for 1969-1996. The database, produced by the Bureau of Economic Analysis, allows the user to view data on personal income, employment, farm income and expenses, and transfer payments by selecting the desired variables, locations, and years.

Rural Development Briefing Room

<www.econ.ag.gov/briefing/rural>

This site provides recent statistics, publications, and reports on rural America issues, including rural manufacturing, rural income and poverty, rural credit and agricultural finance, rural conditions and trends, minorities in rural areas, and implications of an increased minimum wage for rural America.

Rural Economic Policy Program

<www.aspeninst.org/rural>

The REPP of the Aspen Institute fosters collaborative learning, leadership, and innovation to advance rural community and economic development. This site offers information on building community capacity, fundraising strategies, flexible business networks, rural development strategies, and community-based forestry. It also describes the new Rural Development and Community Foundations Initiative, which aims to engage and develop the capacity and role of community foundations in rural community economic development.

Rural Information Center

<www.nal.usda.gov/ric>

The RIC from the National Agricultural Library provides information and referral services to local government officials, community organizations, health professionals and organizations, rural electric and telephone cooperatives, libraries, businesses, and rural citizens working to maintain the vitality of America's rural areas. The Center combines the technical, subject-matter expertise of Extension's nationwide educational network with the information specialists and resources of the world's foremost agricultural library. This site offers links to model projects, best practices, and case studies; includes many publications online; and gives access to many rural resources on topics from federal funding to health.

Rural Partners

<www.ruralpartners.org>

Rural Partners is a member-driven forum that links individuals, businesses, organizations, and communities with private and public resources to maximize the potential of rural Illinois. It seeks to promote rural community and economic development activities, to encourage private/public partnerships for rural communities and economic development, to strengthen the leadership capacity in rural Illinois, and to increase collaboration among local governments and communities. This site includes descriptions of initiatives which credit their success to the help and leadership of RP.

USDA Rural Development

<www.rurdev.usda.gov>

A wealth of information fills the pages of the Rural Development site. Business and cooperative programs, housing and community facility programs, utility programs, community development and empowerment programs, the National Rural Development Partnership, and other programs to improve the economy and quality of life in rural America are detailed. Of particular interest is "Ideas that Work," in which case studies exhibit successful project designs and management techniques for everything from health care to child care to recycling to the arts.

Education

Especially for Rural/Small School Superintendents

<www.aasa.org/Issues/Rural/rural.htm>

This site within the pages of the American Association of School Administrators provides information on and discussion of current issues and ideas important to rural educators.

National Clearinghouse for Educational Facilities

<www.edfacilities.org>

The NCEF is an information resource on K-12 school planning, financing, design, construction, operations, and maintenance. One interesting feature on their site is "Hot Topics," with annotated links to full text publications and web sites as well as descriptions of related books, studies, reports, and articles.

National Education Association

<www.nea.org/issues>

Though the NEA doesn't particularly focus on rural education, the issues discussed on their site, such as charter schools, class size, and safety, concern rural and urban areas alike.

National Rural Education Association

<www.colostate.edu/Orgs/NREA>

The NREA is a strong organization of rural school administrators, teachers, board members, regional service agency personnel, researchers, business and industry representatives and others interested in maintaining the vitality of rural school systems across the country. This site contains information about publications, special events, initiatives, and more.

Organizations Concerned About Rural Education

<www.ruralschools.org>

The OCRE coalition of more than two dozen organizations is dedicated to improvement of public education and economic development in rural America. Web pages include a toolkit for working in the community, data on and reports of what is being done throughout rural America, and a "library" of links to basic information about rural public education and current issues.

The Rural Center at the Appalachian Educational Library

<www.ael.org/rel/rural/index.htm>

The specialty of the AEL is rural education, with a focus on fostering the relationship between rural schools and their communities. The Rural Center offers facts and figures, tools for school improvement, web bookmarks for rural educators, news on grant opportunities, and a variety of information on important issues.

The Rural Challenge

<www.ruralchallengepolicy.org>

The Rural Challenge is a national nonprofit organization helping rural communities develop and operate effective public schools. The Policy Program seeks to strengthen the ties between rural schools and their communities, to inform the public debate over rural education policy, and to help rural communities act on education policy issues affecting them.

Rural Clearinghouse Information Server

<www-personal.ksu.edu/~rcled>

The Information Server is maintained by the Rural Clearinghouse for Lifelong Education and Development, a national effort to improve rural access to continuing education. This site includes articles, lessons learned, special project information, and links to many resources on rural education, Internet connectivity, rural development, Extension, and health.

School-Community Renewal Design

<www.nwrel.org/ruraled/scr.html>

The program is part of a collaboration between the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory and five communities, designed to develop the skills, processes, and capacity to sustain community-school revitalization. This site describes the program, specific case studies, and tools and services available to rural communities.

Science and Math Initiatives

<www.learner.org/sami>

SAMI is a clearinghouse of resources, funding, and curriculum for rural math and science teachers. Information is divided into categories, but the database can also be browsed or searched by title, description, purpose, and audience.

Finance and Government

Business Development Corporation of South Carolina

<www.businessdevelopment.org>

BDC is a non-bank commercial lending company specializing in SBA loan guaranty programs and debenture financing. Although all loan activities are limited to the state, this site is an excellent example of the detailed information available on the Web. Specific loans and loan programs are described and various forms are available online.

Comptroller's Lincnet

<www.ioc.state.il.us>

The Illinois Comptroller's Office has created a site full of information on revenues, expenditures, contracts, grants, fiscal condition, and much more. The Local Government section offers reports, software, and databases, plus access to the most recent fiscal data of any of the more than 7,000 towns in the state.

FinanceNet

<www.financenet.gov>

A site for public financial management, FinanceNet links government financial management administrators, educators, and taxpayers to catalyze improvements in the productivity of government personnel and in the stewardship and accountability for taxpayer resources. Topics can be searched or browsed.

Government/Legal Information

<www.wiu.edu/library/govpubs>

The Government/Legal Information Unit of the Western Illinois University Library provides an excellent central reference point for both federal and Illinois state government resources. The main page offers access to federal agencies, online documents, Illinois information, and sources by topics such as health and aging.

Innovations in American Government

<www.innovations.harvard.edu>

The Innovations program from the John F. Kennedy School of Government identifies and celebrates outstanding examples of creative problem-solving in the public sector. More than 200 award-winning and finalist programs are described and searchable by year, state, policy category, and key words. This site also includes updates on the current year's awards, essays and working papers, and lists of instructional materials based on the achievements of past programs.

National Association of Counties

<www.naco.org>

The National Association of Counties (NACo) develops and organizes projects and programs to support county government in areas such as community development, the environment, job training, finance, and social services. Programs are searchable by keyword and described in detail. This site includes full articles from several NACo publications for or about counties and key issues. It also provides access to important legislative and policy information.

National Association of Regional Councils

<www.narc.org>

A nonprofit organization, NARC provides information for agencies engaged in comprehensive regional planning and coordination of public, private, and civic efforts to solve regional problems. The economic development section of this site includes descriptions of best practices, links to economic development sites, articles from the *Regional Reporter*, and a bookshelf of recommended publications..

National Community Reinvestment Coalition

<www.ncrc.org>

NCRC works to increase the flow of private capital into traditionally underserved communities, to make community reinvestment activism a common local occurrence, and to promote community-lender partnerships. It leads the movement in which community leaders are becoming educated about and active in efforts to affect the flow of credit and the provision of banking services in their neighborhoods. This site describes services, publications, accomplishments, policy efforts, and more.

SHBBL: Small and Home Based Business Links

<www.bizoffice.com>

SHBBL has collected many resources and grouped them into categories such as franchises, financing, opportunities, marketing, and others. This site also maintains a discussion forum and a "library" of articles on computerizing a business, writing a business plan, human resource management, health insurance, inventory management, and more.

Small Business Administration

<www.sba.gov>

The U.S. Small Business Administration provides financial, technical, and managerial assistance to help Americans start, run, and grow their businesses. This site offers information on starting, financing, expanding, local resources, outside resources, training, outreach initiatives, and much more.

Small Business Advisor

<www.isquare.com>

The mission of the Small Business Advisor is to provide small and home-based business owners with free information to help start and operate the business successfully. This site includes checklists; tax advice; business and marketing tips; articles on topics such as sales, marketing, and legal matters; and much more.

Small Business Information

<www.sec.gov/smbus1.htm>

This site provides information from the Securities and Exchange Commission, such as how small business owners can reach the SEC, completed and pending initiatives of interest to small businesses, a government/business forum, and news for small businesses.

U.S. State and Local Gateway

<www.statelocal.gov>

A site developed to give local and state government officials easy access to federal information. Information is organized into topics such as administrative management, money matters, health, communities/commerce, and others. Resources are also grouped into categories such as best practices and tools.

Health

9-11.com

<9-11.com>

A comprehensive emergency service search and research tool, 9-11.com indexes millions of resources. It offers a medical dictionary, links to articles, and a huge directory of resources in categories such as alternative medicine, emergency services, hospitals and medical centers, poison control, first aid, and health care professionals.

Center for Rural Health and Social Service Development

<www.siu.edu/~crhssd>

The Center, based at Southern Illinois University, conducts research, needs assessments, demonstration projects, program evaluations, and training; tests new models of health care delivery; and develops policy recommendations to improve the health of our rural population. The CRHSSD works as a partner with area agencies to address the most pressing health and social service problems of the region. The site offers a variety of rural health resources and data.

Illinois Rural Health Association

<www.ILruralhealth.org>

IRHA is a not-for-profit corporation committed to improving access to health care and preserving and enhancing the health of rural Illinois residents. It provides access to innovative rural health strategies and networking opportunities. IRHA's related foundation, Illinois Rural Health Foundation, was established to provide scholarships and grants in support of education and research activities that benefit the health of people who reside in rural Illinois.

MCW HealthLink

<healthlink.mcw.edu>

MCW HealthLink is a database of full articles which are searchable by topic. Medical College of Wisconsin Physicians and Clinics publishes MCW HealthLink to provide accurate, timely, impartial, and authoritative medical information.

National Center for Health Statistics

<www.cdc.gov/nchswww>

NCHS is the primary federal organization responsible for the collection, analyses, and dissemination of health statistics. This site allows users to browse publications and statistical tables, conduct online searches, or access FASTATS from A-Z. It also contains information about NCHS surveys, programs, and other activities.

National Health Information Center

<nhic-nt.health.org>

The NHIC is a health information referral service. It puts health professionals and consumers with health questions in touch with the organizations that are best able to provide answers. This site includes a searchable database of more than 1,000 organizations and offices that provide health information.

National Health Information Resource Center

<www.nahdo.org/nhirc/index.html>

The NHIRC is a clearinghouse and communications hub, designed to provide access to resources for building and using health information systems and data. This site includes information about health data projects, electronic systems, and databases; news releases; selected articles; policy forums; and a listing of local, state, regional, national, and international health data sites on the web.

National Rural Health Services Research Database

<www.muskie.usm.maine.edu/rhsr/scripts/Database.asp>

This database of rural health services research projects underway in the United States is funded by the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy. It includes research on the financing, organization, and/or delivery of health services, as well as studies of the prevalence of various health conditions among rural population groups.

Rural Information Center Health Service

<www.nal.usda.gov/ric/richs>

RICHS collects and disseminates information on rural health issues. This site describes federal grant opportunities, publications, rural research centers and projects, case studies, and telecommunications. It also offers access to information resources by subject.

Rural Network Development Grant Program

<www.nal.usda.gov/orhp/network.htm>

Administered by the Federal Office of Rural Health Policy, the program is designed for organizations that want to establish vertically integrated systems of care in rural communities. Specific goals include expanding access to care, coordinating care, restraining health care costs, and improving the quality of care in rural areas. This site offers descriptions of each grant.

RuralNet

<ruralnet.marshall.edu>

RuralNet is a large collection of information and resources from the Marshall University School of Medicine. This site offers sections on rural emergency medicine, telemedicine, rural health partnerships, resources by disease, resources by discipline, physician recruitment, and the interactive patient.

RuralPSYCH: A Resource Center for Rural Behavioral Health

<www.apa.org/rural>

RuralPSYCH serves as a resource for providers, purchasers, and consumers of behavioral health care in frontier and rural areas. The goal of RuralPSYCH is to alleviate the two primary problems encountered by psychologists providing mental health and substance abuse treatment in frontier and rural areas: (1) professional isolation and (2) lack of current treatment information. This site provides a means for communication, offers access to expert resources in tertiary care centers and academic institutions, and includes the full texts of articles from the *APA Rural Health Bulletin* and other sources.

Statistical Resources on the Web: Health

<www.lib.umich.edu/libhome/Documents.center/sthealth.html>

The University of Michigan Documents Center is a central reference and referral point for government information, whether local, state, federal, foreign, or international. The health page groups statistics under headings such as accidents, health insurance, HMOs, hospitals, nutrition, disability, and vital statistics.

Telemedicine Information Exchange

<tie.telemed.org>

The TIE is maintained by the Telemedicine Research Center with support from the National Library of Medicine. It provides definitions, articles, a forum, legal and home health information, and links to related resources.

Libraries

Center for the Study of Rural Librarianship

<vaxa.clarion.edu/~grads/csrl/csrlhom.htm>

The CSRL works to stimulate imaginative thinking about rural library services, identify problems, provide consultative services, conduct and coordinate research, and collect data relevant to the needs of rural libraries. It offers a variety of services and publications.

Collection Development Training for Arizona Public Libraries

<www.dlapr.lib.az.us/cdt>

The CDT site, sponsored by the Arizona Department of Library, Archives and Public Records, provides practical training on how to perform collection development activities in small and rural public libraries. Each activity is presented as a separate section, with links to Internet sites, lists of materials for further reading, and definitions of key terms.

Libri Foundation

<www.teleport.com/~librifdn/index.html>

The foundation exists to help rural libraries acquire quality children's books they could not otherwise afford to buy. This site includes information about projects, children's books, fundraising, and related sites.

Michigan Small and Rural Libraries and the Internet: Three Case Studies

<www.lapeer.org/Cynthia/IPS>

This site documents the stories of three small, rural libraries providing electronic information and services to citizens. Collaborative efforts and initiatives across the state are examined.

Survey of Rural Information Infrastructure Technologies

<www.its.bldrdoc.gov/its/spectrum/rural/ruralrep.html>

This is a lengthy report produced by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration. It defines *rural* and discusses technologies required and available for different telecommunication applications.

U.S. National Commission on Libraries and Information Science

<www.nclis.gov>

NCLIS advises the executive and legislative branches of the federal government on library and information policies and plans. It reports on the implementation of national policy; conducts studies; surveys and analyzes the nation's library and information needs; and coordinates activities at the local, state, and federal levels. This site includes reports on issues such as "Kids and the Internet" and "Moving Toward More Effective Public Internet Access."

Transportation

Community Transportation Association of America

<www.ctaa.org>

CTAA is an association of organizations and individuals committed to removing barriers to isolation and improving mobility for all people. CTAA conducts research, provides technical assistance, offers educational programs, and serves as an advocate in order to make coordinated community transportation available, affordable, and accessible.

Marion County Rural Transportation System Plan

<www.open.org/~mpubwork/present/trans/index.htm>

This site is an example of the growing number of full documents accessible through the web. The complete text of the plan is available and divided into numerous sections.

Project ACTION (Accessible Community Transportation In Our Nation)

<www.projectaction.org>

Project ACTION tries to bring transit, disability, and consumer organizations together under one cause. Their web pages offer forums, a newsletter, publications, project information, requests for proposals, and links to further resources. Of particular interest is the Accessible Traveler's Database, which describes accessible transit services in the United States. The user can highlight the city and state they plan to visit and view all transportation services available to them, both public and private.

Regional Transportation Online Resource Center

<www.nado.org/rtoc/index.html>

The Center's purpose is to provide information on regional transportation issues affecting America's small metropolitan and rural communities. This site discusses best practices related to transportation programs; provides an electronic library containing sample work programs, annual reports, state transportation improvement programs, and studies; accesses the Rural Transportation Planners Network; and offers links to additional resources.

RTAP: The Rural Transit Assistance Program

<www.ctaa.org/ntrc/rtap>

RTAP provides a range of services to transit professionals across the country, including training, materials, and technical assistance. The state and national programs work in partnership to develop services and programs. The National Transit Resource Center is a full-service information and assistance clearinghouse on rural and specialized transportation issues. It offers more than 10,000 computerized entries on topics including human resources, transit funding, legislation and regulations, and more.

Rural Intelligent Transportation Systems

<www.ruralits.org>

This site is dedicated to rural transportation and advanced rural transportation systems. It serves as a forum for the presentation and discussion of issues and ideas relevant to improving the transportation and economic conditions of rural areas through the application of ITS. In addition to the forums are descriptions of rural ITS projects and an ITS library of full documents and links.

RuralFacts: Supported Volunteer Rural Transportation Project

<ruralinstitute.umt.edu/rtcrural/transportation/ruralfacts.htm>

This site describes a project by the Rehabilitation Research and Training Center, whose purpose is to improve the ability of persons with disabilities to live and work independently in rural areas.

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Notes

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